

Islam Puts Back the Clock

By AVRO MANHATTAN

FOLLOWING the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, Islam was made to tumble like an exhausted colossus. When, shortly afterwards, the Sultanate was abolished and the Caliphate discarded, the Crescent, its fabric in disintegration, its prestige almost nil, found itself in eclipse. Indeed, it seemed as if it had truly passed from the stage of history, never to rise again.

Turkey, the centre of the Caliphs, was turned into a centre of secularism. Ancient Islamic traditions were banned. Santa Sophia became a museum, education became compulsory, the veil was torn from the enshrouded woman, the fez was prohibited. Within a few years summary reforms were enacted in almost all other Islamic countries, in a febrile attempt at "modernization." Perhaps the most far-reaching of such reforms was that causing the collapse of the power of the Islamic clergy. This was done by rendering hollow the great body of Koranic law which had governed the largest regions of the Turkish Empire. The mullahs were stripped of their influence to such an extent that Islamic clericalism, it was optimistically predicted, would disappear within the foreseeable future.

Instead, the future, as so often, confounded the prophets. While the First World War seemed to have caused its decay, the second provoked its sudden revival. Within an astonishingly brief period the power of the mullahs has reappeared, and is changing everything. Once more they hold their white or black turbans aloft in the streets, confident of their rising influence. In many regions the *chuddar* has again enveloped Muslim women, the melancholic calls of the *muezzin* are echoing again from the minarets, the *masjid* pulpits are quivering with harangues, often transmitted by powerful radio stations. The fast of Ramadhan is being observed anew with a fanaticism not seen for decades. Restaurants are forbidden to serve meals, music is prohibited in cafés, people smoking during the month when "no true believer" should allow food or drink to pass his lips from dawn till dusk find cigarettes snatched from their lips and trodden underfoot.

If the revived influence of the mullahs had been confined to the religious field its reappearance would have been ominous enough. But it is also being used to seize political power. The mullahs have astutely identified the religious revival with nationalism, social unrest, economic grievances; and so they appear in the guise of champions of Islamic civilization. By such devices they are now

able to mould the pattern of the domestic and foreign policies of most Islamic countries. This is borne out by the fact that they direct parties and infiltrate into government agencies—indeed, have their agents in the very inner Cabinets of sundry Islamic governments.

It is the simultaneous control of such religious and political power that enables them to plunge boldly into action, both at home and abroad. In the domestic field, for instance, they can obstruct and often undo the work of progressive forces by the cunning use of half-authoritative injunctions—e.g. by semi-officially condemning women's emancipation. This was done by a fetwa of the Committee of the Al Azhar University, Cairo, which in June 1952 pronounced against women's right to vote or sit in Parliament, on the authority of Islamic Law. This strengthened the trend of sundry movements to withhold the vote from women, to prevent women attending higher schools or embarking upon professional careers. In Persia the mullahs have gone even further and openly want to reintroduce compulsory veiling of women and to close all girls' schools.

Religious holidays have been officially put back on the calendar. In several countries Ramadhan has been enforced by government decrees on all Muslims whether practising or not. In Pakistan, where the mullahs have condemned birth control, people can be punished for disregarding religious holidays—e.g. anyone found eating, drinking, or smoking in public during the month of Ramadhan can be punished with three days' imprisonment. Where there are not yet official decrees, those not conforming with religious rules are denounced by public opinion, which is whipped up by the mullahs or by politicians backed by the mullahs. Often the work of reformists is annulled overnight by the mullahs' influence in moulding the laws of the country—e.g. in Pakistan, where the mullahs have demanded that the Supreme Court, assisted by a board of mullahs, should decide whether or not laws conflict with the Koran and the Sunna.

Religious and political fanaticism is equally used by them to enforce a veritable legal and illegal terrorism. This can assume diverse forms. For instance, a mullah may become so powerful within a government that he is able to mollify the opposition by the use of his religious influence, appraised in political garb, as demonstrated by Sayad Kashani, the principal head of the Fadayan Islam, the paramount Islamic organization in Persia. Kashani could publicly boast that his power was greater

than that of the Shah. His boast was no exaggeration, for he had become President of the Majlis, where, in November 1952, thirty-five Persian Senators were refused admission into Parliament by his direct orders.

Mullahs can direct terroristic religious bands as an alternative means to shape the domestic and foreign policies of Islamic countries—e.g. in Turkey, where they run the extreme Muslim revivalists, Tejanis, who want to bring Turkey back to the pure doctrine of Islam. Its adherents grow beards and dye them with henna, in the old Muslim manner, and carry on turbulent activities such as organizing attacks on public statues of Kemal Ataturk, whose revolution they are determined to undo. They number 100,000. They are against anything Western. The moderate legal parties bend under the invisible pressure of their clerical masters—e.g. the People's Party and the Democratic Party, which, while officially supporting the laicization policy of Ataturk, have had to reintroduce religious teaching in schools and reopen training schools for Muslim clerics. In Egypt the equivalent of the Tejanis is the Muslim Brotherhood, which wants to establish an Egyptian Islamic democracy. In 1952 the fall of King Farouk was partially instigated by the Brotherhood, one of the real ruling forces of the new Egypt.

Often the mullahs resort to open terrorism. Movements controlled by them black-list people, condemn them to death, and often execute them. Thus in Turkey Muslim religious fanatics have death-lists of editors whom they condemned for "organizing beauty queen contests," which are contrary to Islamic law. Turkish editors were actually shot. In Persia the fanatical Fadayan Islam (Crusaders of Islam) published in the Press a list of public figures scheduled for assassination. Officials, Ministers, and Prime Ministers have been assassinated at clerical instigation. In 1950, Ali Razmara, Persia's ablest Premier, was murdered by a fanatically religious Muslim, Khali Tahmassebi. Two years later (November 1952) Tahmassebi was set free by Sayad Kashani, who embraced the assassin, with the ominous greeting, "You are a brave son of Islam." In 1952, the former President of Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen and eight other leading figures of that fanatical Muslim organization were officially charged with 1,200 murders, 4,000 dacoities, and 3,600 acts of arson, in a conspiracy to establish an autonomous Muslim entity in Hyderabad.

The widespread undercurrent against the predominance of the West is produced neither by economic nor by political conditions alone. Fundamentally it is caused by the Islamic culture reasserting itself against the Western superiority complex and commercial rapaciousness. Islam has

been a dynamic source of civilization. Its resurgence, if controlled by the most reactionary Islamic clericalism, could, besides slowing down progress within the Muslim world, cause serious perturbation in large regions of the globe.

India's split unity with the birth of Islamic Pakistan and the Arab League are but the two most glaring examples of this in Asia and the Near East. In Africa, diverse emphases on Islam have caused dangerous political splits—e.g. the Umma-party, led by El-Mahdy, the religious leader, and the Socialist Republican Party, representing El-Mahdy's religious rival.

What would be the concrete result of a mullah-inspired new Pan-Islamism? A monolithic Muslim bloc, stretching from North-west Africa to the extreme tip of South-eastern Asia, almost to Australia, tacitly antagonistic or, indeed, brazenly hostile, to the West. Such a unit would be a danger to peace. It would be more: a danger to progressive forces everywhere. For this gigantic Islamic bloc would be controlled wholly by the most militantly reactionary section of Muslim clericalism determined to direct the Muslim world, not towards the future, but towards the past.

STRANGE ODYSSEY

Born to Believe. An Autobiography. By Lord Pakenham. (Cape.) 18s.

Lord Pakenham found his way to the Church of Rome via the Labour Party—a somewhat eccentric Odyssey that must surprise many of his political colleagues. He has written a very honest account of his spiritual pilgrimage, and it is characteristic of his engaging simplicity that he should say, without irony, that he was born to believe. One evening, he relates, feeling that "all that mattered most at the centre was missing or confused or deliberately repressed," he walked to Campion Hall, where Father D'Arcy listened sympathetically to his difficulties. The rubicon was crossed, although two years passed before he was actually received into the Church of Rome. No one can doubt either his personal charm or his remarkable charitableness. Converts of this calibre contrast with such Catholic intellectuals as Evelyn Waugh. Lord Pakenham, a born aristocrat, cares deeply for the common man, as his work for the WEA shows. It is otherwise with Evelyn Waugh, who writes with such scorn for the human race, apart from those mentioned in Burke's Peerage. Lord Pakenham unwittingly betrays the difference when he recounts a war-time anecdote of a meeting between Sir William Beveridge and Captain Evelyn Waugh. "'Tell me, Sir William,' said Evelyn, 'How do you get your main pleasure in life?' 'I get it,' said Beveridge, answering the question literally and, as I think, truly, 'I get it by trying to leave the world a little better place than I found it.' 'And I get mine,' said Evelyn, 'in trying to spread alarm and despondency, and I expect I get a great deal more than you do.'"

HECTOR HAWTON